

HARRIET TUBMAN

Negro Soldier and Abolitionist

BY EARL CONRAD



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I. EARLY LIFE AND REVOLT

THERE is an element of the incredible in the brutal facts of Harriet Tubman's early life. Indeed, she had no childhood, for in her fifth year she was plunged into hard labor, and was beaten so mercilessly and so regularly that the meaning of slavery is to be found in her experience. Her eyes were wide open to the tyrannous nature of her environment, and by the time she was in her 'teens, she was a smoldering volcano of resistance. Then, one day, she found herself embroiled in an encounter which changed her life, and which launched her career as a liberator.

This may have happened in the fall of 1835. Harriet always believed that she was born about the year 1820, and that she was fifteen when the incident occurred. It was in Dorchester County on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, not far away from Harriet's home town, Bucktown. She had been working as a field hand for some time. The work was hard, the hours were from sunrise to sunset, and the overseer was harsh. A slave was not supposed to leave his place unless he received the permission of his overseer, but one evening while they were at work cleaning up wheat, husking corn, and performing the myriad other tasks of farm life, one of the field hands suddenly put down his tools and left his work, saying that he was going to the village store in Bucktown. As he started off, Harriet noticed that the overseer followed.

Harriet wanted to see what would happen. Or, perhaps she was thinking of *preventing* something from happening. Whatever her thoughts, she followed the two men. The overseer trailed the slave into the village store, and hot words were exchanged. Harriet arrived in time to hear the overseer ask some slaves who were standing nearby to help tie up the field hand and prepare him for a whipping. They refused, and when the overseer turned to Harriet and commanded her to help, she too declined. At that point, the field hand decided to run for his life. As he sped through the open door, the overseer started in pursuit, but confronting him in the doorway was a girl, black as ebony, her body crouched in a defensive position, prepared to block the exit.

The overseer caught up a two-pound counter weight, and hurled it toward the doorway. The block of iron struck Harriet a stunning blow on the head, and she fell unconscious to the floor.

For months thereafter, Harriet barely clung to life. She lay on a bundle of rags, in the humble cabin of her mother, who tried to nurse her back to health, to console her and to minister to her needs. Throughout winter the young girl hovered close to death. She lay still, muttering to herself, hating her master, despising all of slavery, and wishing for a different, a happier, life.

Then she took up prayer.

It was a strange kind of prayer. At first, and for many months, she prayed that her master be *changed*. But when he did not change, and instead tried to sell her to buyers who intended to ship her to the hated chain gangs of the deep South, she prayed: "O Lord, if you aren't ever going to change that man's heart, *kill* him, Lord, and take him out of the way."

It was the same kind of religion that Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey had acquired, the kind that had made of them bold Negro leaders. It was *applied* religion, a religion premised on the need for a tremendous social change.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Harriet regained strength, and by the time she was able to go to work again she was a new person. She had learned to think very critically, albeit in religious terms, and she was in quest of a way out of her bondage.

The injury to her head had left her with a singular type of sleeping seizure. Periods of somnolence would descend on her several times a day, and she would fall asleep for a while. This occurred intermittently, no matter what she was doing; and for the remainder of her life she suffered from this strange malady. She had been scarred with a large dent in her skull. There are persons who are still living who remember that mark and even touched it. It was no wonder that Harriet could not for a moment forget the source of her suffering.

In the succeeding years, Harriet worked as a field hand, preferring this to domestic toil inside the plantation manors. Outdoors there was at least the sparse freedom of the fresh air and the smell of the earth. Although she was only about five feet tall, she became solid, muscular, and so strong that her strength was exhibited as one of the sights of the plantation.

Her owners interpreted her sleeping seizures as a sign of dull-wittedness, but they were wrong; for Harriet, although she brooded a great deal, was very keen and observant. The more she watched her people in their bondage, the more she yearned to do something for them. How deeply she felt their enslavement was

revealed years later when she said, "I had seen their tears and sighs, and I had heard their groans, and I would give every drop of blood in my veins to free them."

Harriet retreated into the shelter of family life. She was one of eleven children. Strangely—yet not strange under slavery—Harriet inherited two sets of names. Her mother was Harriet Green and her father was Ben Ross. Since slaves were not allowed legal marriage her mother had to retain her maiden name. Harriet was known in childhood both as Araminta and Harriet. It was only with her marriage that she became known as Harriet Tubman.

Harriet had long known of the Underground Railroad, that remarkable method of travel by which slaves escaped to the free states. Dreaming of "following the North star" herself some day, she listened eagerly to stories of slaves who had made successful escapes. Most important, she listened to rumors of great events in the North.

Free Negroes who could read said that there was a movement for Negro liberation going on there. Men and women were raising their voices against slavery! William Lloyd Garrison, a poor printer, had cried out against the bondage of the black man; the authorities had jailed him, and when freed he had founded *The Liberator*, a newspaper which the slaveholders hated. There were scores of other white people who were vocal in behalf of the bondsman and, most important, there was incessant activity among the Negroes themselves. Slaves were going North in a steady stream, fighting their way step by step, town by town, night after night.

Harriet heard that black men actually talked in public in the North and that white men listened to them!

Marriage prevented Harriet from going North for a few years. In 1844 she married John Tubman, a free Negro, whom she loved deeply, but with whom she lived for only five years. They looked at life differently. He was more or less resigned to his station, and did not understand his wife's unrelenting hatred for her enslaved condition. She talked to him of fleeing to the North, but he would not listen to her.

Slavery at last became unbearable to Harriet, and one night in the year 1849, accompanied by two brothers, she started for free soil. The brothers, fearing capture, returned soon after they set out, but Harriet went on. Whether she chanced upon one of the organized routes of the Underground Railroad, or whether she groped her way northward primarily by her own efforts, is uncertain, but it is known that she received some aid, at the outset, from a white woman acquaintance who helped her get away. In any case, she went alone. She made her way each night through field and forest, past villages and farms, sleeping in the open, in barns, and under haystacks, seeking out an occasional haven with Negroes, and aided, perhaps, by one or two Quakers. At last she arrived in Pennsylvania.

It was morning when she reached freedom, and she stood on a hill and looked all about her. That was an epochal moment in the history of the Negro people.

Later Harriet described her first reaction to freedom, in the following words: "When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything. The sun came like gold through the trees, and I felt like I was in heaven."

II. FOLLOWING THE NORTH STAR

THE Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes, by land and by sea, over which Negroes traveled in order to reach the free states and Canada where they were allowed to live and work in relative freedom. These underground channels had been in operation as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. In the 1780's, George Washington, writing to friends, complained of escaping slaves; much earlier, in the seventeenth century, Virginia had passed laws covering the capture and return of fleeing Negroes. But in that early period, escape was not the organized institution that it became at the turn of the nineteenth century, with "stations" located in hundreds of cities and towns along the border states.

When Harriet made her escape, the Underground Railroad was fairly well organized, both in the East and the Middle West, and was effectual enough to harass the slave owners. The system had received its name from that modern industrial invention, the railroad, with its locomotives and trains, its stations and terminals.

By the time Harriet left Maryland, there was scarcely a town that did not have some sympathizers ready to serve the Underground Railroad. Slaves fled even from the deepest parts of the South, making their escape by land routes, or by boat along the Atlantic coast. A few even allowed themselves to be crated in boxes and shipped north by express! Probably no method of escape which human ingenuity could devise was unknown to the fugitive Negroes. There were two main routes of travel: One was in the Middle West, leading from the South through Ohio, and culminating in Can-

ada, the other was the Seaboard Route, or Eastern line, on which Harriet became the outstanding "engineer." The Middle Western line was directed from Cincinnati by the Quaker Levi Coffin. His was an enormous contribution to the development of the Railroad, but he functioned as a "station agent," or receiver and forwarder of slaves, rather than in the perilous business of "conducting."

It is in the story of Harriet, the conductor, that the Railroad's history may be best understood. It was under her influence that the art of escape reached its highest stage of organization, and it was she who became known, for the success of her labors in this field, as the "Moses" of the American Negro.

Immediately after Harriet arrived on free soil she determined to aid her family and as many of her people as possible to flee from the horrors of the slave country.

"I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming," she said later. "I was free but there was no one to welcome me in the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land, and my home after all was down in the old cabin quarters, with the old folks and my brothers and sisters. But to this solemn resolution I came. I was free, and they would be free also. I would make a home for them in the North, and the Lord helping me, I would bring them all there."

In order to do this it was necessary for Harriet to find work and to earn money. She found employment as a domestic in various hotels in Philadelphia and Cape May, New Jersey, and reveled in the experience of receiving pay for her services at free-labor, that economic advance which all of her people needed. Several times, when she had the chance to improve her working conditions, she changed jobs.

Harriet had never been taught to read or write. She had had no schooling whatever. But she did not allow this lack to prevent her from communicating with relatives in Maryland. She dictated letters to others, and the answers were read to her. By this means she arranged to go to Baltimore to aid her sister and two children to escape. This was in December, 1850, and it is the first record of Harriet as a "conductor."

To become a conductor was to risk one's life at every moment. So dangerous was this work that a famous New England minister, Parker Pillsbury, once remarked that although there were large numbers of anti-slavers who were willing to aid the Underground Railroad with funds, who were quick to admire those active in rescue operations, there were few who were willing to act as guides! It is not surprising that the majority of the conductors were Negroes, for it was their freedom which was at stake.

It has been estimated that during the 1850's, the period in which Harriet Tubman functioned, at least five hundred Negroes were engaged annually in going back and forth between the Northern and Southern states! Indeed, so vast did these operations become, that about 75,000 Negroes succeeded in reaching northern freedom during the existence of the Railroad.

Previous to 1850, Harriet had to pilot her groups only as far as such free states as Pennsylvania or New Jersey. But in 1850, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, which compelled northern authorities to return fugitives to their masters, it became necessary for slaves to seek refuge in Canada.

At once, the free states were almost denuded of fugitives. From that time on, Harriet had to journey about five hundred miles, across a half dozen states, each time

she piloted a group of Negroes. The dangers of escape tripled. The vigilance of the authorities increased. But the Underground Railroad tightened its lines of operation, increased the number of its workers, and became a well-organized movement.

Thousands of whites and Negroes all over the country aided the slaves in their flight. By means of a messenger system, and by using the United States mails, the sympathizers of the Railroad prepared to receive and send on fugitives. Conductors and station agents knew their allies in neighboring towns, and maintained constant and steady communication. They notified one another regarding the number of slaves to expect at a given time, whether they were coming on foot or by carriage or in disguise, and they kept one another informed of incidents of the struggle—captures, fights, jailings, and so forth. In fact, the system was so perfectly organized in one western region that the agents even had stationery, on which the letterhead, "Underground Railroad," was printed. But this was unusual and somewhat violated the prevailing and necessary secrecy.

Perhaps the best proof of the hazardous nature of life on the Underground Railroad is Harriet's own statement, in which she revealed the reason why she was willing to face the slave power: "There are two things I've got a right to, and these are death or liberty. One or the other I mean to have. No one will take me back alive. I shall fight for my liberty and when the time has come for me to go, the Lord will let them kill me."

The South was an armed camp. The slave states were patrolled by uniformed police, by county and state authorities, and by plain-clothes' vigilantes. Every overseer carried a revolver. It has been said that each proslavery white man in the South carried a weapon and

that no slaveholder went to bed at night without fire-arms under his pillow. To pass through enemy territory such as that, to outwit such a network of armed oppression, was enough to tax the ingenuity and the courage of any slave or guide on the Railroad. Perhaps that is why Harriet became known as one of the ablest conspirators of this period, for, in ten years of incessant toil for her people's emancipation, she never lost a "passenger." Hers was an exceptional record. There were dozens of other conductors, chiefly men, and some of them rescued larger numbers than did Harriet. But most of them met with some mishap; many conductors were jailed, a few were killed, and others were scarred for life. One ex-slave, speaking of Harriet's skill said, "Moses has got the charm. The slaveholders can't catch Moses." Yet it was more than a mystical charm. Franklin B. Sanborn, Abolitionist editor, declared that Harriet "accomplished her purpose with a coolness, foresight, patience, and wisdom, which, in a *white man*, would have raised him to the highest pitch of reputation."

Song was one of the fugitive's most practical weapons, and Harriet was adept in its use. When nearing plantations, she sang to reveal her presence to those expecting her. Often, en route, when companies became separated, Harriet employed song to indicate safety or danger, to reunite her parties, or to warn them to remain separated.

She carried a pistol, and although she never had to employ it against betrayers or slave-hunters, she was always prepared and often said that she would have used her gun had it been necessary. More than once members of her parties became frightened, and wanted to return. Then she would hold her gun to the slave's head and say, "Brother, you go on or die." And he always went on—to his own freedom.

The chief guide in finding the way to the free states was the North star. Harriet said that she always knew that star from any other, that she could never mistake it, and that so long as it shone, she could get any party of slaves to the Northern states.

Alone, no man or woman could have fought the slave power, and no single person vanquished it. The movement for liberation was broad and scores of outstanding workers made great contributions. Harriet was aided in her task by Quakers, free Negroes, slaves, ministers, generous rich people, and many others. All through Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Ontario Province in Canada—the route of the states through which Harriet led her bands of slaves—there were worthy men and women, Negro and white, who gave freely of their time and energy and money to help move along the constant stream of fugitives. Harriet soon became acquainted with the most important of these allies.

Among them was the Quaker business man Thomas Garrett, who lived in Wilmington, Delaware. He was one of the most outspoken white opponents of slavery south of the city of New York, and he spent all his money, except what he needed for the support of his large family, to help pay train fare for fugitives, to buy food and clothes for them, and in other ways serve the cause of freedom.

Harriet had several important assistants in Philadelphia, which was one of the big "terminals." Chief among these was William Still, a militant Negro, prominent in the anti-slavery councils of the state of Pennsylvania. He was head of the local Vigilance Committee which forwarded slaves to New York City. Still kept records of the fugitives who passed his way, and hid his chron-

icles so that the authorities were never able to locate them, and thus learn the names and whereabouts of escaped slaves. These records are among the most valuable accounts of the trials of the fugitives.

Of the large corps of receivers located in New York, perhaps the most important were the Negro editor and writer David Ruggles, and Oliver Johnson, a white man, who edited the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. This newspaper was as influential in the fight against the slave power as was *The Liberator* of William Lloyd Garrison. Both Ruggles and Johnson helped Harriet on her "runs" through New York, aiding the companies she piloted on to Albany.

From Albany, Harriet steered her charges to the home of Gerrit Smith, wealthy philanthropist and reformer, who lived in Peterboro, New York. This was always an important stop. Smith met Harriet early in her career, encouraged her in her operations, and listened with keen attention to the accounts of her travels. Smith, who helped materially in determining the rise of the Republican Party, influenced Harriet's politics. He was involved in a controversy with the Garrisonian Abolitionists, who favored the disunion theory as a means of solving the slave question. Garrison and his eloquent follower, Wendell Phillips, believed that the Constitution was a pro-slavery document, and that there was no hope for the Negro while he lived under it. Therefore, they reasoned, sever the Union; let the North remain a free North, and have no relations with the slave-ridden South. The Garrisonians saw no merit in parliamentary political action. Gerrit Smith believed otherwise. He regarded the Constitution as an anti-slavery document and believed that the Negro could be freed through an amendment. Smith influenced both Harriet Tubman and Frederick Doug-

lass in this belief. It was this interpretation of the political problem which prevailed after the war.

In Syracuse, Harriet found shelter at the home of Jermain W. Loguen a former slave, now a minister. Loguen was in favor of using stern methods against the slave power. He forwarded Harriet's bands on to Auburn, a small town nearby, which was an Abolitionist and woman-suffrage center, and in which lived Senator William H. Seward, who aspired to the Presidency. Seward, who had coined the famous "irrepressible conflict" phrase, entered rescue work to the extent of housing Harriet's parties and in 1857 he sold her some property on very reasonable terms, and made it possible for her to settle her parents in that town.

From Auburn, Harriet's bands were delivered to Rochester, where Frederick Douglass and the woman's suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony housed the slaves, and paved the way for the last "jump" to Canada.

Frederick Douglass was not only the outstanding leader among Negro militants, but he was also the greatest of all the Abolitionists. Douglass began his agitational activity as an associate of Garrison, but very early broke with the latter's disunion theory. After very careful study of the Constitution, he reached the conclusion that the Union could be preserved while still allowing the Negro to go free. He moved from New England, which had been his headquarters, to Rochester, New York, where he founded a monthly newspaper, first called the *North Star*, and later, the *Frederick Douglass Monthly*. This paper became the leading exponent of the theory of Abolitionism via the parliamentary route, and was the organ of the National Abolitionist Society, the political action group formed to consolidate those

Abolitionist forces which believed in working toward amendment to the Constitution. Douglass became a powerful force in welding the united front which later became transformed into the Republican Party. He knew how to utilize all of the weaknesses of the enemies of the Negro people, and he taught the Abolitionist movement to learn to advance by any and all measures. Douglass, whose home was a regular stop for escaping slaves, believed that the actual rescues themselves did not offer a real solution to slavery. The number that escaped to the North, compared with those compelled to remain, was relatively small. But the Negro leader knew that the Underground Railroad was an important political force in sharpening the differences between the North and the South, and that out of the Railroad's work came recruits for the Abolitionist cause. An escaped slave himself, Douglass regarded Harriet Tubman's labors for the cause of freedom as a contribution superior to his own, and he compared her with only one other figure of that time—John Brown.

Through such associates as these, Harriet Tubman early became conversant with the many political issues, with the various partisan wings of the Abolitionist ranks, and with the proposed solutions. She emphatically rejected the views of the Colonizationists, who favored a back-to-Africa movement. She believed that the Negro had the right to build a free world for himself on American soil, preferably in the South. Once, in Canada, remarking on her escape from slavery, and her love for her native soil, she said, "We would rather live in our native land (the South), if we could be as happy there as we are here." Although Harriet, together with Douglass, Smith, and Seward, believed in using the parliamentary arm to advance Negro freedom, she ad-

mired the Garrisonians as an educational force and accepted their support in her Railroad operations.

In the summer of 1857, Harriet heard that her aged father, Ben Ross, was in trouble. He had been arrested, and charged with having assisted slaves to escape, a "crime" of which he was guilty. As she was short of funds when she heard the news, Harriet hurried to the offices of the Anti-Slavery Society in New York, and obtained sufficient money to make a trip to Maryland. She arrived just in time. Her father was scheduled to appear in court on the following day, but he was not being held in custody. Harriet determined to take the matter into her own hands.

Thomas Garrett has described what ensued. "She brought away her aged parents in a singular manner. They started with an old horse, fitted out in primitive style, with a straw collar, a pair of old chaise wheels, with a board on the axle to sit on, another board swung with ropes fastened to the axle, to rest their feet on. She got her parents on this rude vehicle to the railroad, put them in the cars, and turned Jehu herself, and drove to town in a style that no human being ever did before or since; but she was happy at having arrived safe. Next day I furnished her with money to take them all to Canada. I afterwards sold their horse, and sent them the balance of the proceeds." From town to town, by coach and train, Harriet piloted her parents northward, until they arrived in St. Catherines, Canada.

Harriet's talent for eluding capture was by now recognized throughout the Abolitionist movement. The stories of her experiences passed from one to another in all anti-slavery quarters. One, described by Thomas Garrett, recalled the time when, despite cold March

weather, Harriet waded across several icy streams, in order to avert discovery by pursuers, compelling "two stout men" who were with her to follow. Another took place in Bucktown, the scene of her original escape, when by chance she was confronted on the street by her former master. She had foreseen the possibility of such a meeting, and had armed herself with two chickens, which she allowed to escape as the slaveholder drew near, and by chasing the chickens she avoided recognition. On still another occasion, she helped the sweetheart of one of her brothers escape, by disguising her in men's clothes.

By 1858, Harriet was known in progressive circles in England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada, Liberia, and South America, and she received funds from Canada and Great Britain to continue her work. In America, knowledge of her work was beginning to spread to the general public outside of anti-slavery circles although she preferred to remain unknown to the outside world in order to make her Underground Railroad work more effective. By this time, the spirit of escape was rampant throughout the Eastern shore. Fugitive parties increased in size, and slaveholders intensified their militant vigilance over the Negro population. The master class knew of a fearless and effective operator who was denuding their plantations of chattel, but many of them believed that "Moses" was a man. Their desire to capture "Moses" became so great that there were huge rewards offered for "his" capture, a single one running as high as \$40,000.

Throughout Maryland there was panic among the slaveholders, and in 1858 and 1859 they held conventions to determine what they could do to end the abductions of their property. These conventions were the

highest tribute to Harriet Tubman, for she more than any other single person was responsible for the decrease in the market value of slaves in Maryland. Bucktown, her home town, was almost depopulated of its slaves, so great had been her influence there. She had brought to the North most of the members of her family, hundreds of other Negroes, and she had stimulated large numbers, perhaps thousands, to escape by themselves.

It has been estimated that Harriet made nineteen excursions into the slave country, and this figure has been generally accepted. The economic consequences of this to the slaveholders, together with the moral effect of her work upon the Abolitionists, and the culminating political results which intensified the antagonisms between the North and the South, earn for Harriet Tubman the title of a great leader in the liberation movement.

III. CAPTAIN JOHN BROWN AND GENERAL TUBMAN

JOHN BROWN was born of Puritan parents in Connecticut in 1800. Few will dispute that he was the outstanding white figure in the Abolitionist movement, just as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman were its Negro leaders.

The "Old Man," as he was often affectionately called, had early in life dedicated himself to the principal object of liberating the Negro. He knew that the black man had been chained by brute force, and he believed that there would have to be some bloodshed before the slave was freed. It was his hope that there might

be as little of this as possible, and he studied the strength of the slavocracy with a view to determining how speedily and how painlessly it could be overthrown. As he entered his fifties, he became more and more impatient with the constant growth of power of the slaveholders and reached the conclusion that guerrilla warfare might weaken the market value of the slave, and possibly force a collapse of the slave system.

For several years he had engaged in the work of the Underground Railroad and had learned the geography of the country. In the fall of 1858, he had traveled into the deep South, and he also knew the West. During the mid-fifties, the North and the South were struggling to win control of the territory of Kansas. Both sections of the country wanted the newly opened territory for the expansion of their own social systems and, in 1854, when anti-slavery and pro-slavery forces rushed into that area, small-scale warfare broke out at once. John Brown speedily went there, accompanied by several of his sons, and defended the new settlements against the inrush of pro-slavery elements. During the sharp fighting which followed, John Brown's name became known all over the nation and a large number of young men, opposed to slavery, rallied to his side, constituting a defense corps for freedom. The slave power hated Brown; the Abolitionists came to regard him as their military chieftain.

Brown and his free state soldiers defended Kansas for several years. It was not until about 1858 that it became secure as a free soil state, and even then the situation was indecisive. Elections were violent, and guerrilla warfare between anti-slavery and pro-slavery forces continued. During these years John Brown learned the uses of irregular warfare, and he was anxious

to try out a plan that he had long had in mind for a liberation movement among Eastern slaves. He believed that by means of local fighting in the Appalachian Mountains, he could weaken the slave power. Negroes would join such a force of fighters, and thousands of others, who might not be fitted for fighting, would escape and be sent on to Canada, or settled on free soil in the Northwest. A showdown would occur between the North and the South. For this Brown needed the assistance of many Eastern allies, both white and Negro; he needed money, arms for his men, and recruits to fight with him. He planned to start with the corps of young men who had helped him defend Kansas, for now was the time to strike.

In the spring of 1858, he left Kansas, headed for New England, to consult with some important Bostonians who would back him financially. Receiving their promise of support, he went to New York State to see Gerrit Smith and Frederick Douglass, hoping through them to secure the aid of freedmen in Canada to serve with his small liberation army. The New York allies recommended Harriet Tubman as the key to the Canadian freedmen, and it was arranged that Brown, accompanied by the Reverend Jermain W. Loguen, the Syracuse station agent on the Underground Railroad, should go to St. Catharines to visit Harriet, whose work often took her to Canada although her permanent home was now in Auburn.

Brown, who had long known of Harriet's work, but had never met her, greeted her in the following way when he first set eyes on her: "The first I see is General Tubman, the second is General Tubman, and the third is General Tubman." That name together with "Moses" remained with her permanently.

Brown described his plan for the invasion of Virginia, and asked Harriet whether she would work with him. She was in full accord with the scheme. Whatever military information she had about the Virginia terrain, the scope of the Underground Railroad in that area, and the numbers of allies, she now passed on to Brown. She promised him she would at once try to enlist all of her personal following in Canada West as recruits to his army and agreed to function in that part of his plan which called for shipping to the North slaves who would escape as soon as the firing began.

They discussed one other important point. This was the possibility of holding a convention a few weeks later in Canada, to which would come those recruits who would serve at his side. Harriet consented to get as many reliable freedmen as possible to attend the gathering.

John Brown was elated at Harriet's response. The matter of men to fight with him was now he believed in the hands of one on whom he could rely. He wrote to his son, John Brown, Jr., that "Harriet Tubman hooked on his whole team at once. He is the most of a man naturally that I ever met with." And Brown was a man not used to speaking or writing in superlatives.

Brown saw Harriet several times during that trip to Canada but he had to leave to take up other organizational problems elsewhere. They agreed to keep in touch with each other through Frederick Douglass.

In the second week of May, 1858, the famous Chatham convention was held. Although there is no record of Harriet having attended the meeting, it seems most probable that she was there. She was certainly in Canada at the time, and many of the Negroes present at the

sessions were her recruits. Harriet was in the very center of the campaign by now and it is doubtful whether anyone else other than Brown had more to do with the formulation of plans for the invasion.

However, because of the threat of betrayal by one of his associates, a military adventurer named Hugh Forbes, it was necessary for Brown to postpone his plan of liberation. The hope of heading for Virginia directly after the convention was abandoned.

Harriet returned to Auburn. There she took care of her aged parents, and worked now and then as a domestic. She remained vitally interested in Brown's plan, but continued functioning on the Underground Railroad. At about this time she began to address small gatherings of Abolitionist sympathizers in central New York, but in the main she tried to keep out of the public eye, the better to be able to function in underground methods of anti-slavery work.

By the winter of 1858-1859, she came to look upon her association with Brown as the principal form of her political work and decided to go to New England to learn what developments were growing out of Brown's plan.

A historic meeting took place at the home of Wendell Phillips, in Boston. John Brown brought Harriet Tubman to the noted orator. This was the last time that Phillips was to see Brown, and was his first meeting with the Negro woman. Brown had entered Phillips' home, with Harriet at his side, saying: "Mr. Phillips, I bring you one of the best and bravest persons on this continent—General Tubman, as we call her." Brown then described some of Harriet's intrepid work on the Underground Railroad and revealed her as a supporter of his

invasion plan. One of his casual remarks was that Harriet could lead an army as well as any military man that ever lived. Phillips, from that time on, became Harriet's staunch friend and aided her in her work.

Harriet returned to Auburn for the remainder of the winter, but toward spring, she became active again. On her way east, she stopped at the home of Gerrit Smith in Peterboro, where in all likelihood, she saw John Brown who was also in that vicinity. The plan for the campaign in Virginia was being revived. Harriet suggested that July 4 would be the best time to begin operations and the suggestion seems to have been favorably received by Brown, for it was much discussed in an exchange of letters between various principals in the plan.

At about that time another of John Brown's allies, the Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Unitarian minister who had a parish in Worcester, Massachusetts, wrote a significant letter to his mother. It is a good estimate of the esteem in which Harriet was held at this time. He said:

"We have had the greatest heroine of the age here, Harriet Tubman, a black woman and a fugitive slave, who has been back eight times secretly & brought out in all sixty slaves with her, including all her own family, besides aiding many more in other ways to escape. Her tales of adventure are beyond anything in fiction & her generalship is extraordinary. I have known her for some time and mentioned her in speeches once or twice. The slaves call her Moses. She has had a reward of \$12,000 offered for her in Maryland and will probably be burned alive whenever she is caught, which she probably will be, first or last, as she is going again. She has been in the

habit of working in hotels all summer, saving up money for this crusade in the winter."

There is, however, no record of Harriet having conducted any Underground excursions at that time. She was concentrating on her work with John Brown, traveling through New England, doing *missionary* work, as someone put it. She was trying to recruit, to raise funds, and to involve important people in the plan.

Meanwhile, the "Old Man" and some of his aides were in the region of Harper's Ferry, familiarizing themselves with the terrain, and waiting for the arrival of men and arms. John Brown had been in communication with Franklin B. Sanborn, an Abolitionist writer, who lived in Concord, Massachusetts, urging him to get in touch with Harriet Tubman, and to go to Canada with her to revive the interest of the Canadian fugitives, and send them on to Virginia.

To augment the activity of his Northern allies, Brown sent his son, John, on a "Northern tour," in August. It was the job of the younger Brown to stimulate the activity of the sympathizers, to get funds and recruits. Young John went from Ohio to central New York, and from there on to New England. In the correspondence between the various participants in the plan, Harriet Tubman was referred to as "the woman," but for a time nobody seemed to know her whereabouts. One of young Brown's main purposes in going to New England was to locate "the woman . . . whose services might prove invaluable," as Frederick Douglass put it.

Harriet had fallen sick!

The years of hard work, her chronic ailment, the heavy responsibility of caring for her parents, and her ceaseless political activity had finally caught up with

her—and at a critical time. She was in New Bedford, Massachusetts, when it was necessary for her to drop all work.

But in spite of her ill health she had started for Harper's Ferry when John Brown, fearful of waiting any longer, decided to strike. She was in New York City when she heard that Brown was battling Federal troops at Harper's Ferry on October 16, 1859.

Brown had wanted a Negro leader at his side. He had consulted with Frederick Douglass, but the latter had foreseen the certainty of military failure, had recognized as futile the attempt of a small band of men to smite the long established edifice of slavery, and had decided against joining Brown. Harriet had wanted to go not from any lack of theoretical clarity, nor because she felt any more confident than Douglass in the ability of a few individuals to overthrow the slave power, but because she believed in Brown, and was convinced that whatever happened in Virginia would have far-reaching results.

Though neither Douglass nor Harriet were with him, John Brown did have at his side twenty-one fighters, of whom five were Negroes. These men struck a blow that was echoed in the outbreak of the Civil War. This brave action and Brown's tragic death on the gallows never left Harriet's mind, and a generation later she wanted to name her Home for the Aged and Indigent after the man who had called her General. It was Brown, not Lincoln, who was the greatest white benefactor of her people, she believed.

John Brown had found in Harriet Tubman an inspiration which few other persons aroused in him. He had discovered in her a powerful moral vindication for the work he had set himself.

IV. A NATIONAL FIGURE

DURING the succeeding months, while the storm of controversy raged over John Brown's revolt, Harriet tried to keep under cover. For that reason, and also, because she was still in ill health, she spent the winter of 1859-1860 in Auburn. Her part in the Harper's Ferry drama was revealed in the Senate Report of the Committee Investigating the Harper's Ferry Invasion; it broke into the newspapers and rapidly spread by word of mouth throughout Abolitionist, woman suffrage, and other reform movements.

By spring, 1860, Harriet was ready to resume work. Her first step was the acceptance of an invitation to attend an anti-slavery conference in New England. On her way there, she stopped in Troy, New York, and unexpectedly found herself leading one of the most violent demonstrations that preceded the Civil War.

While resting in Troy, word reached her that a fugitive slave, Charles Nalle, had been captured. He was being arraigned before the Federal Commissioner at that moment, and since there was no question that he was guilty of being an escaped slave, his return to his owner was inevitable unless something was done immediately.

Harriet at once aroused the Negro community. They must organize a rescue party. The courtroom where Nalle was being tried must be entered if possible. The townspeople must be mobilized in the main street. A boat must be ready at the Troy River to take Nalle across to Albany County as soon as he was seized from the hands of the law. Get out the white friends, she ordered! Sound a fire alarm and bring the people to the center of Troy!

All this was done as soon as her lieutenants could act. Before very many minutes had passed, a huge throng had congregated in the center of the town, just below the courtroom.

This was not a new type of demonstration. Such rescues had taken place in various cities of the North for many years. There had been daring rescues of fugitives in Syracuse, Rochester, Boston, Cleveland, and many other places. Some of these attempts had resulted in the freeing of fugitives, and a few had failed. But the Abolitionists had learned that one such demonstration, especially if successful, was worth a thousand speeches.

Harriet managed to get past the door of the courtroom, by simulating an aged and decrepit old lady. As she watched the proceedings, she waited for the opportunity to give the signal to her friends in the street to make a rush for the fugitive. The trial was a cut-and-dried affair. The attorneys for Nalle did manage to appeal his case, and it was arranged that he be tried at once before a local judge of the Supreme Court. This necessitated his removal to another office a few blocks away.

This was the opportunity for which Harriet had been waiting. As the police were leading the fugitive down the stairs into the street she gave the signal to her allies in the street throng. She was the first to seize hold of the prisoner, to wrest him from his captors. Then followed a violent battle between pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces. The struggle went on for hours, scores were injured by clubs, stones, and even guns. But Harriet maintained her hold on Nalle, and led the throng toward the Troy River. At last the police were forced to relinquish their grasp on the prisoner.

Almost unconscious from injuries received during the

struggle, Nalle was placed on board a boat that took him to the opposite shore, but here another set of authorities recaptured him and took him to the Police Justice's office. Harriet, foreseeing the possibility of his rearrest, had issued a call for sympathizers to follow her across the river and several hundred made the trip in a large ferry boat. When they learned that the fugitive was being held in the office of the Police Justice, they struck again. Led by Harriet, they broke through the barricaded doors of the office, and while some fighters grappled with the authorities, Harriet and some other Negro women rescued Nalle, put him into a wagon that was headed west and started him off to Canada.

Harriet had to go into hiding, for the authorities knew that this woman was responsible for the rescue. Regional Abolitionists carefully hid and protected her until she went on to Boston, but there the Abolitionists had heard of her latest feat even before her arrival and the demonstration which greeted her became front page news throughout the nation. John Brown of Harper's Ferry would have been proud of her. She had just delivered a thousand speeches!

The rescue of Charles Nalle is commemorated in the town of Troy, New York, by a bronze tablet placed on a building at the site of the demonstration.

Harriet's versatility—her ability to “conduct” on the Underground Railroad, to lead men into battle, to plan for national liberation as she had with Brown, and to speak for her people's needs—now received the unstinted admiration of the Abolitionist and progressive world.

That summer, Harriet made regular public appearances at woman suffrage meetings, at Negro conventions and Abolitionist gatherings. One of her anti-slavery

speeches was reported in *The Liberator* by James Yerrington, a man who was used to recording all of the fiery eloquence of Wendell Phillips, Garrison, Douglass, and others, but who was so deeply affected by Harriet that he could only listen to her, and was unable to report her words. Yerrington wrote: "The mere words could do no justice to the speaker, and therefore we do not undertake to give them; but we advise all our readers to take the earliest opportunity to see and hear her."

All through that summer Harriet Tubman worked with New England leaders, forming friendships which were broken only by death. In Concord, effervescent with political and literary life, she stayed with the Alcotts, the Horace Manns, the Whitneys, and the Brooks family. Perhaps her closest friend was Franklin B. Sanborn, with whom she had in common their mutual association with John Brown. Sanborn took her to the homes of distinguished people, including that of Ralph Waldo Emerson, where she stayed for a time in the beautiful, pine-surrounded house, which was a mecca for the nation's intellectuals.

At the private gatherings which Harriet attended, the Abolitionist leaders listened to her with the closest attention. She dominated the anti-slavery parlors just as Phillips and Garrison and Frederick Douglass dominated the lecture halls. In her ringing discourse, in her confidence in the ultimate freedom of her people, the anti-slavery leaders saw justification for the cause in which they fought. They listened intently as she talked of her bondage and of her freedom, and shared her experiences with them. She taught them the dances of Maryland and of the deeper South, and sang the little known folk songs of these regions. It was not as an entertainer that she did this but rather as one who real-

ized that she was in the presence of leaders and educators who wanted to absorb the culture of her people. It was with pride, as an example and symbol of the Negro, that she presented herself to them.

There were endless political discussions at these gatherings. Harriet declared her position. To her there was no such thing as merely understanding the evil of slavery. Understanding meant action if it meant anything. Freedom would come only with the recognition of the need for blows, more blows and ever more telling blows against the enemy. Like Frederick Douglass, she was in favor of employing all means in the struggle—parliamentary reform, moral suasion, slave-rescuing, petitions, demonstrations, cultural expression, and, finally, insurrection and large-scale military struggle, should that be necessary. That a civil war would break out was clear to one who had traveled back and forth for years between the two fires. Once, in this period, she remarked to Franklin Sanborn: "They may say, 'Peace, Peace!' as much as they like; I know there's going to be war!"

V. THE WAR YEARS

DURING the summer and the fall of 1860 which found Harriet in New England and New York State, the struggle intensified. The Presidential campaign and Lincoln's election in November marked the beginning of the crisis. South Carolina seceded from the Union, and from that time on war was inevitable.

Harriet made her last trip to Maryland in the service of the Underground Railroad in November and Decem-

ber of 1860. Neither the unsettled condition of the country nor the increased vigilance of the slaveholders daunted her. Late in November she was tramping through the slave states with Stephen Ennets, his wife Maria, and their three children, bringing them North. On their way, Harriet picked up another couple, a man and his wife. Thomas Garrett, writing to William Still of the dangers at that time, said: "I shall be very uneasy about them till I hear they are safe. There is now much more risk on the road, till they arrive here, than there has been for several months past, as we find that some worthless wretches are constantly on the lookout on two roads, that they cannot well avoid, more especially with carriage; yet, as it is Harriet who seems to have had a special angel to guard her on her journeys of mercy, I have hope."

When Harriet arrived in New York, she faced a new development. The anti-slavers, who for years had been chiefly concerned with the safety of her slaves, now expressed great alarm for *her* welfare. She must take no more risks on the Underground. Compromise was rampant in political circles, and the Abolitionists feared that men in high places might be willing to sacrifice Harriet in a compromise with the South. Northerners desirous of averting war, and ready to endorse the Fugitive Slave Law as an evidence of faith with the South, were suspected of desiring to turn her over to the authorities. Harriet was hurried off to Canada, despite her protests. She remained there for several months, until the war broke out, when she immediately hastened to New England. Apparently she had in mind one more trip to Maryland to bring out the last of her family, but her course led elsewhere. The Negro historian, William Wells Brown, reports that Harriet was soon active in

the rear of the Union Army, and that she was "doing good service for those of her race who sought protection in our lines."

She was back in New England when news came of the capture of Port Royal in South Carolina. Reports were arriving in the North that large numbers of Negroes were coming into the Union lines. Officers of the Department of the South sent bulletins to Northern newspapers, calling for volunteer workers to come to Port Royal and begin the work of reconstructing Southern society and of preparing the Negroes for their new life. Harriet prepared to go at once. But it was not easy to arrange for transportation nor to settle all of her affairs at home, and it was not until the spring of 1862 that she arrived in South Carolina.

Once, during the winter, while Harriet was still in the North, she confided to the journalist and Abolitionist Lydia Maria Child her view of Lincoln's hesitant policy on the waging of the war. The President feared to use the Negroes in battle, feared to emancipate them, and was still trying to placate the rebellious border states. Harriet compared the situation to the aphorism, "Never wound a snake, but kill it." In terms of that image, she described to Lydia Child the meaning of the present hour. Portraying the Confederacy as the snake, she expressed the opinion that so long as the slave power was allowed to strike back, the Union was in danger, the Negro remained in slavery, and there could be no decisive victory. If Lincoln would save lives and money—and the country—he must use the mighty black arm of the Negro on the battlefields. Lydia Child agreed with Harriet and wrote to the poet John Greenleaf Whittier of the good sense of Harriet's views.

Harriet arrived in South Carolina on the Government

transport, *Atlantic*. Governor Andrew of Massachusetts who arranged for her passage believed that her Underground Railroad training would make her useful to the Department of the South as a scout or spy.

When Harriet plunged into the work of aiding the newly freed people in South Carolina, they knew little of her work in the North. She had to win her spurs anew. At first she was allowed to draw rations as a soldier, but when the freed people interpreted this as favoritism, she voluntarily relinquished that right. Thereafter, she supplied her own needs by making and selling pie and root beer.

Upon her arrival, she had received about \$200 for her services, which she immediately invested in building a laundry. Here she spent time helping the Negro women organize a washing service, so that they might become self-supporting.

Harriet worked among her own people at the outset, nursing the many who had fallen ill. Numerous slaves had come great distances to seek shelter within the Union lines. They had undergone severe hardships; malnutrition was widespread; and as a result, there was plenty of work for Harriet. She listened to their complaints, and was their spokesman. She taught them to produce articles for their own consumption, to wash and sew, to keep their living quarters clean, and to make and sell various articles to the soldiers. In one of the letters which she dictated and sent to Franklin B. Sanborn, then editor of *The Commonwealth*, in Boston, she said:

"Most of those coming from the mainland (from South Carolina to the Sea Islands), are very destitute, almost naked. I am trying to find places for those able to work, and provide for them as best I can, so as to

lighten the burden of the Government as much as possible, while at the same time they learn to respect themselves by earning their own living."

Harriet worked in the Union hospitals and was of great assistance to the doctors. She did everything, from bathing and nursing the wounded and sick to performing such menial tasks as scrubbing and cleaning, and ridding the sick rooms of flies. As epidemics of malaria, smallpox, and dysentery broke out in various parts of the Department, she was sent with the regular medical staffs to help subdue the ravages of disease. She became the "trouble shooter" of the Department of the South.

Yet these were only her lesser responsibilities. Primarily, she was employed in the organization of an Intelligence Service for the General Staff. Negro spies were regarded as the most valuable in detecting the operations of the enemy and to Harriet was given the assignment of organizing a spy and scouting corps. To this end, she organized a band that performed excellent work for the Federal General Staff. She learned the names of the best river pilots in the region, and organized eight of them into a squad which was constantly at the service of the Department and later participated herself in these scouting operations.

To the officers and men of the Department of the South had been assigned the task of holding the Sea Islands, of keeping the blockade effective, of taking the city of Charleston, South Carolina, and of harassing the Confederacy throughout the Southeast. The military tactic utilized in this zone was that of guerrilla warfare, and this required an intimate knowledge of the local terrain.

All through the summer of 1863 many such small-scale operations took place, and Harriet's brave men

prepared the ground for the successful raids that were made by white and Negro troops.

One of the largest and most effective campaigns, which resulted in the freeing of more than seven hundred and fifty slaves, was led by Harriet herself. She and her scouts had made careful observation of the enemy defenses along the Combahee River, a stream that ran from the Port Royal region inland about fifty miles. On each side of the river there were large plantations on which were hundreds of slaves who were ready to escape to the Union lines. The Confederates had placed torpedoes in the river to prevent any incursions by Union boats. Harriet informed the Department heads of the opportunity to lift the torpedoes and make an effective raid in this area. She asked for the assistance of Colonel James Montgomery, an expert in guerilla warfare, to help her. Mobilizing about three hundred Negro troops, Harriet and the colonel set out on three gunboats on the night of June 2, 1863. They sailed up the Combahee, lifted the torpedoes, and set fire to the plantations. The slaves were asked to come aboard their boats and the slaveholders were driven inland. The Confederacy had taken a loss estimated in millions.

Then, for many weeks afterward, Harriet was involved in the job of re-establishing these freed Negroes. The Department built new barracks for them, fed and clothed them, and prepared them for free labor.

News of Harriet's latest performance was flashed to New England, where it was heralded as one of the most stirring events of the war. It still remains the only military campaign in American history planned and *led* by a woman. So satisfied was General Hunter with the result of the raid that he wrote a letter to the Secretary of War saying that this expedition was but "the first

experiment of a system of incursions which will penetrate up all the inlets, creeks, and rivers of the department." The same general, writing to Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, said that he expected these operations to compel the rebels "to lay down their arms and sue for restoration to the Union or to withdraw their slaves into the interior, thus leaving desolate the most fertile and productive of their counties along the Atlantic seaboard."

Harriet's popularity among the newly freed was now as great as it had been among the slaves of Maryland, and was equaled only, as one historian said, "by the great deference shown her by the Union officers who never failed to tip their caps when meeting her."

Franklin Sanborn, writing in *The Commonwealth* of Harriet's work in general and of the Combahee River event, referred to her national reputation by saying that "the desperation of a poor black woman has power to shake the nation that so long was deaf to her cries," and called her career "as extraordinary as the most famous of her sex can show." According to General Saxton, who succeeded General Hunter in command of the Department of the South, Harriet "made many a raid inside the enemy's lines, displaying remarkable courage, zeal, and fidelity."

All through the years 1863 and 1864, there were forays and large-scale engagements: the fighting on the Sea Islands, the siege of Fort Wagner, the bombardment of Charleston, the slaughter at Olustee, the fight on Morris Island, and many others. As spy, or raider or nurse, Harriet was active on numerous fronts.

In July of 1863, Harriet witnessed the battle of Fort Wagner, one of the most significant of the war. In order to get into the city of Charleston, it was necessary to

assault the fort, but this was possible only by a frontal attack, the troops moving toward it over a narrow causeway. This was the first action in which large numbers of Negro troops went into battle, and the whole country waited to see how they would perform. Led by a white officer, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, several thousand Negroes advanced on the fort. They were met by a withering blast of fire and they went down by the hundreds. But these brave soldiers preferred to be shot down rather than retreat; they plunged ahead—and fell. Colonel Shaw gained the parapet of the fort, and he too fell. The slaughter went on for hours until only a few wounded men remained. But the news of the courage of the Negro troops spread all over the North, and from that time on Negro soldiers were used in the most hazardous undertakings, becoming, as Lincoln said, the decisive force in the war.

Harriet described the assault on Fort Wagner to the historian Albert Bushnell Hart: "And then we saw the lightning, and that was the guns; and then we heard the thunder, and that was the big guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling; and when we came to get in the crops, it was dead men that we reaped."

According to photographs of Harriet taken during the war period she always wore a war uniform: a dark blue coat, blue dress and blue and white kerchief, in accordance with the Federal colors. She carried a service satchel filled with first-aid necessities and she was never without her rifle. When she went on raids or scouting expeditions, she wore ankle-length bloomers.

She had to rely a great deal on the use of passes and certificates in order to move about. The letters and documents pertaining to Harriet's war service may be seen

in the government files in the building of the House of Representatives, and the letters have also been printed in the *Congressional Record* and in Senate reports.

In 1864, weary and worn from her labors, and wanting to see her parents, Harriet arranged to go North on a furlough. Recuperating in Auburn, she visited various Abolitionist friends. She stayed for awhile at the home of Gerrit Smith, and from there went on to New England. In Boston she met Sojourner Truth, the Negro evangelist and suffragist. These two great women discussed Lincoln, Sojourner regarding him as a friend of the Negro, even if not satisfactory on all issues, and Harriet retaining a more critical view of the President.

At a later period, when speaking of Lincoln, Harriet said:

"I used to go see Mrs. Lincoln, but I never wanted to see him [Lincoln]. You see, we colored people didn't understand then that he was our friend. All we knew was that the first colored troops sent South from Massachusetts only got seven dollars a month, while the white got fifteen. We didn't like that. . . . Yes, I'm sorry now I didn't see Mr. Lincoln and thank him."

It was early spring of 1865 before Harriet was well enough to return to the South. She wanted to be there for what she felt now was certain Northern victory, for Sherman had marched through Georgia and was turning northward toward Richmond. However, when she went to Washington to secure her transport passage to the South, a new project came to her attention. The prominent Negro leader, Martin R. Delany, physician, explorer, and Abolitionist, a man second only to Frederick Douglass in the leadership of the American Negro, had gone to Lincoln with a plan for the creation of a

black army to be officered by Negroes. Lincoln joyously welcomed Delany's plan, and prepared to put it into execution. Delany's idea was to recruit and train as rapidly as possible a Negro army which would enter the South with the flag of Emancipation unfurled and recruit the slaves to his army. This would counteract the attempts of the Confederacy to compel the Negroes to join its forces, and it would complement and complete the work being done by Sherman, Grant, and the other Federal generals. Delany explained to Lincoln that by means of the Underground Railroad, "a system of communication known to Negroes," and with the support of Harriet Tubman, it would be possible to prepare the slaves for the arrival of the Negro army. It was a bold plan.

Lincoln expressed his approval to Secretary of War Stanton, and Delany was given a commission, becoming the first Negro major in American history. His first act was to communicate with Harriet Tubman, to whom he described his plan. He relied upon her for the preliminary agitational work of preparing the slaves of the deep South. Harriet agreed to help and her passage to Charleston, South Carolina, was granted.

However, by this time, the end of the war was in sight. Harriet felt that Delany's plan was no longer necessary to a Northern victory. She became a nurse in the hospitals of the James River region. As the most reliable report puts it: "Relinquishing her plan of returning to the Department of the South—without a thought as to the unfortunate pecuniary results of this irregular proceeding, she went to the hospitals of the James River . . . where she remained until July of 1865." During that month she made several trips to Washington to advise authorities there of serious abuses in some

of the hospitals. So impressed were the officers that Harriet was appointed a matron. Secretary of State Seward, on whom she always called when she was in Washington, was instrumental in this appointment.

With the war over Harriet's services came to an end. Her aged parents called for her to return and she decided to go back to Auburn. On her way north she received the "reward" for her service to her country. Entering a northbound train, she was brutally manhandled by a conductor who would not recognize her government pass, refusing to believe that a Negro woman could be traveling as a soldier. He ordered her to leave the car and started to push her out. Perceiving how strong she was, he called three men to his assistance, and together they forced her into a baggage car in which she rode all the way to New York.

Not only did Harriet fail to recover from this physical maltreatment for years but the spiritual wound remained for the rest of her life. Abolitionist newspapers commented on the incident and reported it as a symptom that the Negro was not yet free and that there was great need for a continuance of the struggle.

VI. LAST YEARS OF HARRIET TUBMAN

HER experience during the war years, culminating in the incident on the train during her trip home, left Harriet ill and exhausted as well as penniless. She settled down on the outskirts of Auburn, hoping to occupy herself with domestic life and the care of her parents.

But the need of her people proved too urgent for retirement into the domesticity Harriet had hoped for.

Many Negroes who were in distress came to Harriet for help, and despite the urgency of her personal situation she welcomed them, feeding and housing the weak and the sick. These new responsibilities led her to intensify her efforts to obtain payment by the government of its debt to her for war services, but despite pressure brought by influential people, the request was not granted. Instead, Harriet had to raise money from wealthy friends for the support of those who settled upon her doorstep.

By 1867 she had plunged into reconstruction work and was carrying out her responsibilities with the same confidence she had felt before and during the war years. The financial struggle was acute. She borrowed as heavily as she could, worked at any available domestic labor and scrimped and saved. In the summer she cultivated a garden and went from house to house selling vegetables and chickens. By these means she not only supported herself, her parents and her other dependents, but maintained two schools for freedmen in the South. In addition, she gave parties to raise funds for freedmen, addressed public meetings, helped build the local Negro church, and worked with the women suffragists of Auburn and the central New York region.

Harriet's great interest in the struggle going on in Congress between the supporters and opponents of Negro rights was dramatized by the news of her husband's death in Maryland in September 1867. John Tubman had gotten into an argument with Robert Vincent, a white man, and had defended himself, for which Vincent had shot him. On Vincent's trial and acquittal, the *Cambridge Intelligencer* (a local newspaper) commented:

"The Republicans have taught the Democrats much

since 1860. They thrashed them into a seeming respect for the Union. They educated them up to a tolerance of the public schools. They forced them to recognize Negro testimony in their courts. But they haven't got them to the point of convicting a fellow Democrat for killing a Negro. But even that will follow when the Negro is armed with the ballot."

Two other events occurred during the next two years that affected Harriet's personal life. In the spring of 1869 she married Nelson Davis, who had fought in the Department of the South, and in 1868 her biography, written by Sarah H. Bradford, was published and the proceeds of its sale given to Harriet. This temporarily lightened her financial burden, but not for long. The government continued to deny her a pension or the back pay to which she was entitled as a nurse and as a soldier. Her neglect became a scandal that broke into magazines and newspapers from time to time.

The eighties and nineties were hard years for Harriet, years in which her second husband, her parents, and her old friends passed away. But at the close of the century, when she was nearly eighty years old, she achieved two of her greatest desires. The government gave her a pension of twenty dollars a month for the remainder of her life and she was able to found a Home for the Aged and Indigent. In addition, a home was established in her name in Boston and it is still one of the most active community centers in New England.

Despite her great age, Harriet was still active. She helped build the African Methodist Church; she participated in temperance work and she spoke at woman suffrage meetings, appearing on the same platform with its leaders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both of whom greatly admired and respected her.

One of the last acts of Harriet's life was the purchase of twenty-five acres adjacent to her home. This property was turned into a free farm, community operated, and guided by the Negro people of Auburn. Known as the Harriet Tubman Home, it became a shrine visited by Negroes and white Abolitionists. For Harriet was, by now, an almost legendary figure—a figure which a new generation pointed out, saying, "There goes Harriet Tubman." Although awarded very late, honors were now hers. Many visitors came from all parts of the United States to meet her; from Queen Victoria she received a medal, a silk shawl, a letter congratulating her on her work for the Negro people and an invitation to come to Great Britain. Harriet was unable to go abroad, but all this made her constant "copy" for feature writers who found abundant drama in the story of her life.

Despite the honors paid her and the publicity she received, Harriet's last years were years of poverty. During an interview with a *New York World* reporter, in 1907, she made her own comment: "You wouldn't think that after I served the flag so faithfully I should come to want in its folds." Then it occurred to her that she could symbolize the meaning of her own life in this interview. She recalled that in her childhood, as a slave, she had been forbidden to eat the fruit of the trees she had been made to plant. Turning to the reporter she asked him if he liked apples. When he said that he did, Harriet inquired whether he had ever planted any. He confessed that he had not. "But," said Harriet, "somebody else planted them. I liked apples when I was young and I said to myself: 'Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folks to eat,' and I guess I did."

In March, 1913, when she was ninety-three years old,

Harriet contracted pneumonia. Just before her death, which occurred on the tenth, she conducted her own farewell services, leading those at her bedside in the singing of spirituals. The local newspaper called her deathbed scene as thrilling a chapter in her life as any of the previous acts in the drama. Harriet Tubman was buried with military rites and her death was treated as national news.

One year later, the people of Auburn honored their great townswoman and dedicated a bronze tablet to her. In June, 1914, a large mass meeting was held in the town auditorium. The Mayor issued a proclamation calling for all flags on public buildings and private homes to fly at half-mast. The meeting was attended by thousands of people, Negro and white, who heard Booker T. Washington and other prominent people pay homage to Harriet and her contribution to America and to the Negro people. Washington described her fight for the full freedom of the Negro, declaring that her contribution was essential to the advance which the Negro people had made. She had made it possible for the Negro to stride forward in the economic sphere, he said, and finally, "She brought the two races closer together and made it possible for the white race to place a higher estimate upon the black race."

The bronze plaque of Harriet Tubman which was then placed on the County Court House entrance remains there to do everlasting honor to one of the greatest of American women.

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